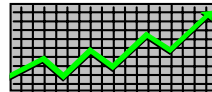


# **SURVEY OF VETERANS' SATISFACTION WITH THE VA EDUCATION BENEFITS CLAIMS PROCESS:**

**2001 Summary Report  
National and Regional Processing Office (RPO) Trends**

Bringing the  
"Voice of the Customer"  
into Decision-making



**Surveys and Research Staff  
Data Management Office  
Veterans Benefits Administration  
April 2002**

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# Acknowledgements

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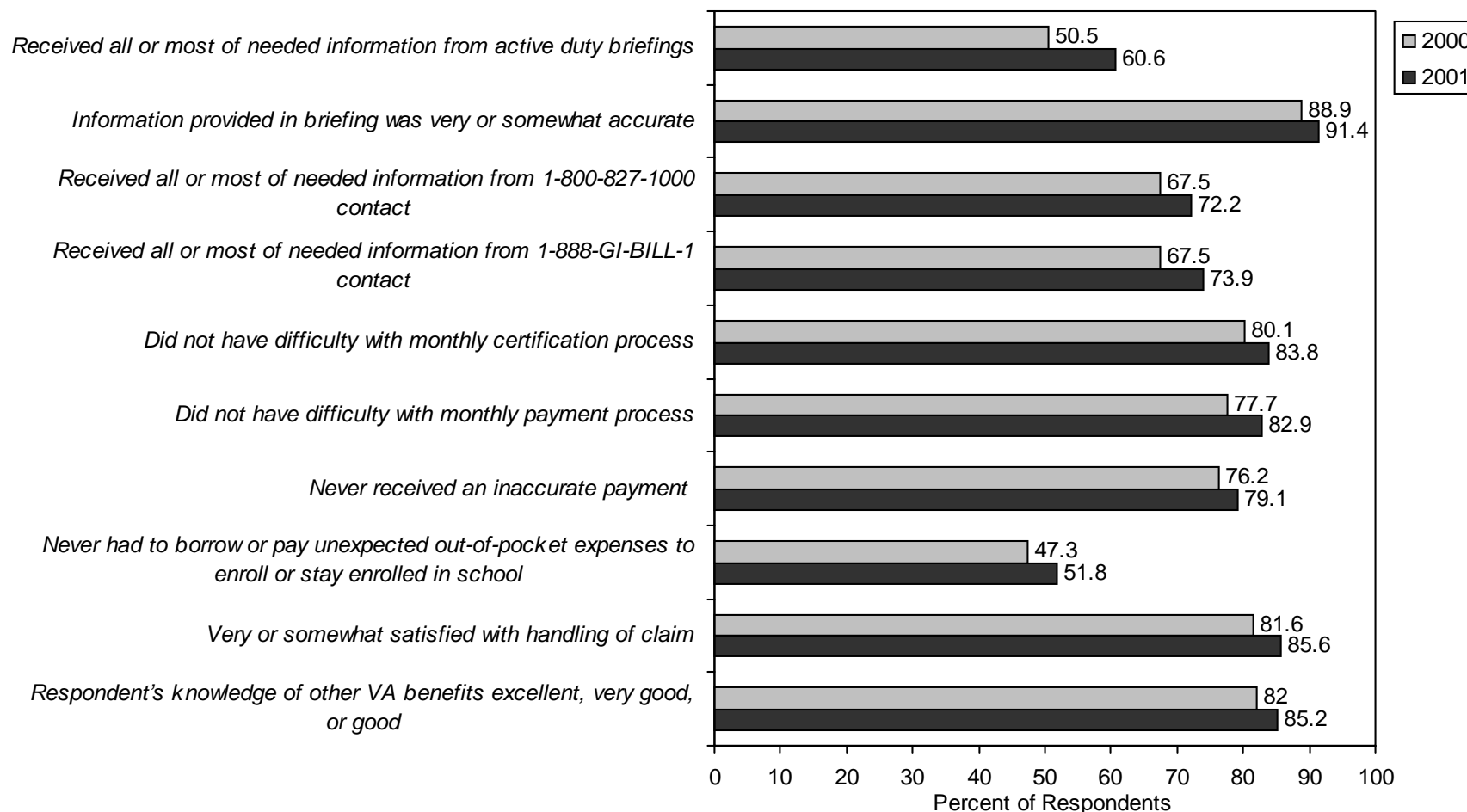
# ***Executive Summary: National Highlights***

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- Nationally, 85.6 percent of all surveyed education beneficiaries were very or somewhat satisfied with the way their claims were handled. This is a *significant increase* over the 81.6 percent of respondents who were very or somewhat satisfied in the 2000 survey, and continues a significant trend upward in satisfaction since 1999, when 78.8 percent of respondents were satisfied with claim handling.
- The following items were identified as areas of importance to satisfaction with claim handling on which VA is performing extremely well (more than 80 percent of the beneficiaries responded positively):
  - VA 1-800-827-1000 contact was very or somewhat responsive.**
  - VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact was very or somewhat responsive.**
  - VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact was very or somewhat courteous.**
  - Respondent's knowledge of VA benefits for which they might be entitled excellent, very good, or good.**
- The following items were identified as areas of importance to satisfaction on which VA could be performing better (less than 80 percent of the beneficiaries responded positively):
  - Very or somewhat easy to get through to VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1.**
  - Got all or most of needed information from 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact.**
  - VA kept respondent completely or mostly informed of status of application.**
  - Inaccurate payment resolved in a timely manner (for those who received inaccurate payments).**

## Executive Summary: Significant National Trends

- VA's **performance increased** significantly on the following customer service items between the 2000 Survey and the 2001 Survey:

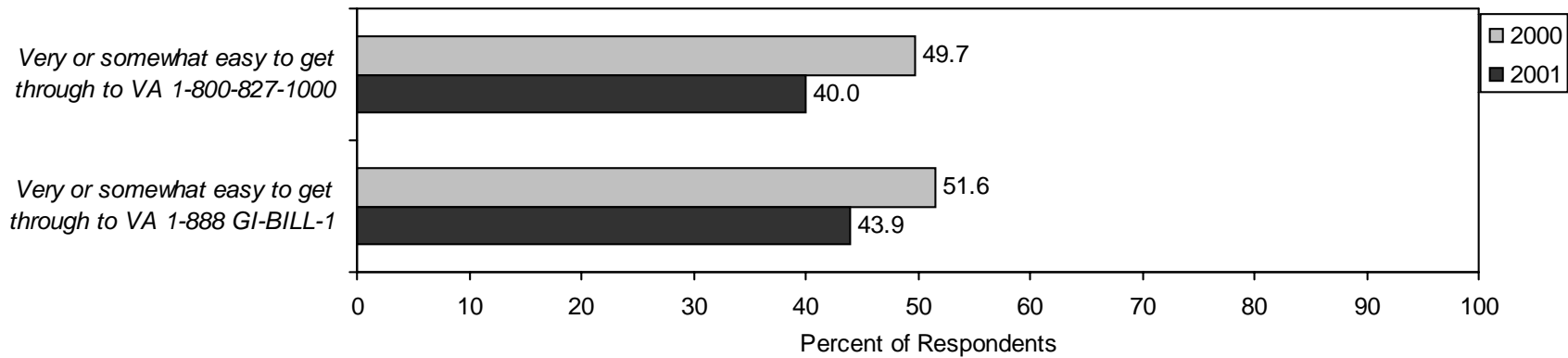


- For the third year in a row, respondents are experiencing greater ease in both the monthly certification and payment processes. Those who did not have difficulty with the monthly certification process increased from 70.4 percent in 1998 to 83.8 percent in 2001, and those who did not have difficulty with the monthly payment process increased from 67.5 percent in 1998 to 82.9 percent in 2001.

## ***Executive Summary: Significant National Trends***

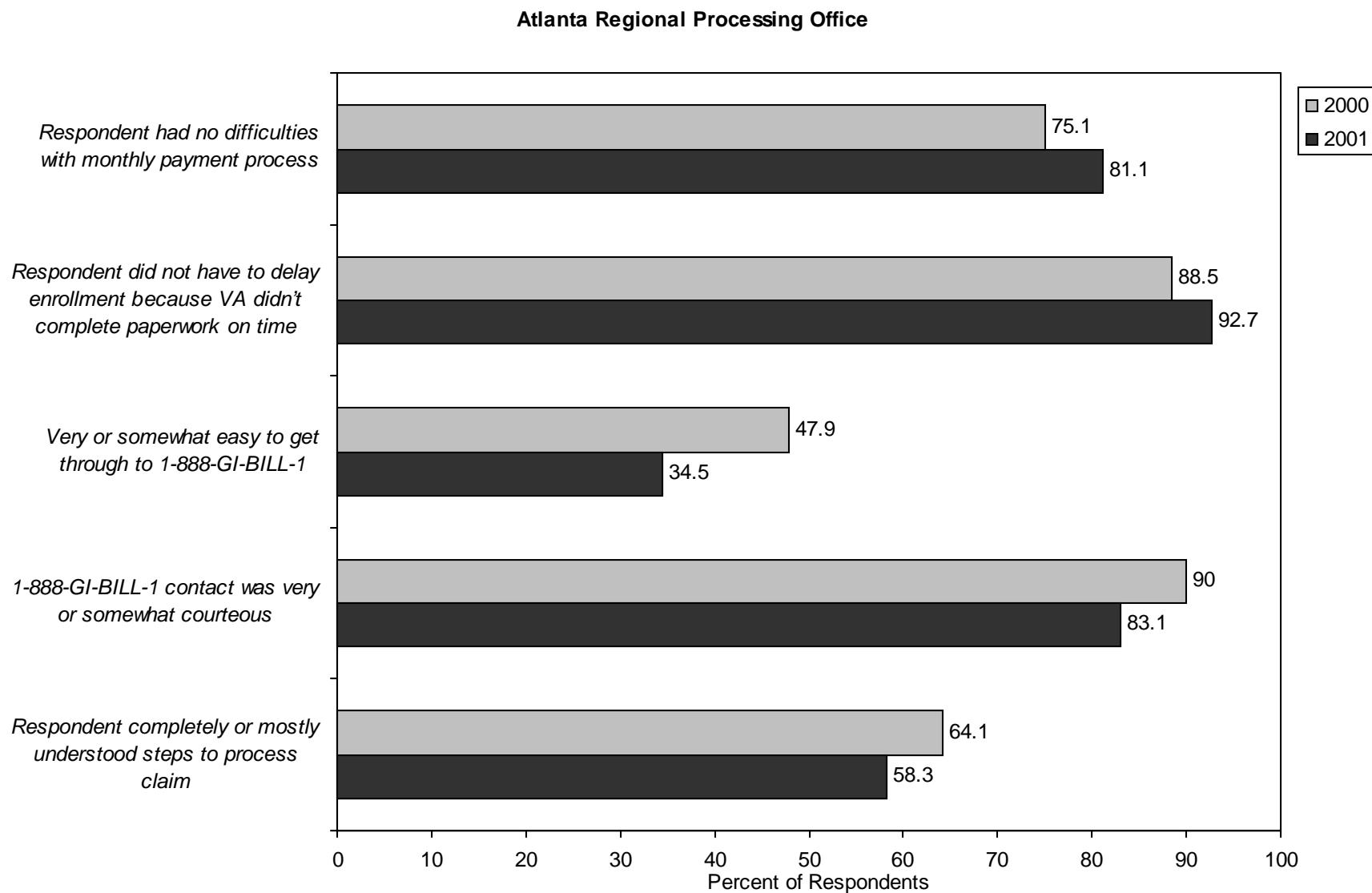
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- VA's **performance decreased** significantly on these customer service items between the 2000 Survey and the 2001 Survey:



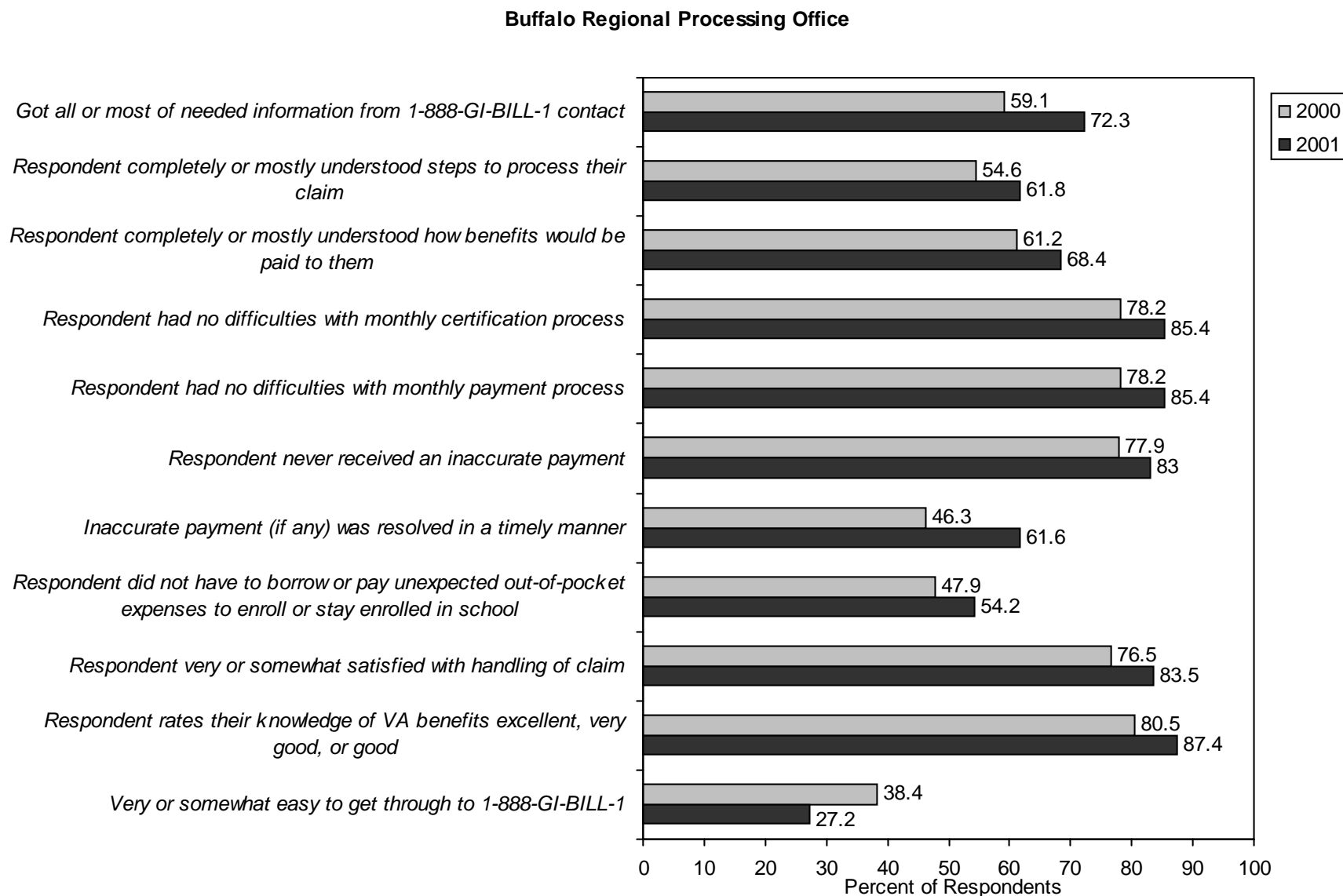
## *Executive Summary: Significant RPO Trends*

The following chart shows the significant **increases and decreases** in customer satisfaction for the Atlanta Regional Processing Office between the 2000 Survey and the 2001 Survey.



## ***Executive Summary: Significant RPO Trends***

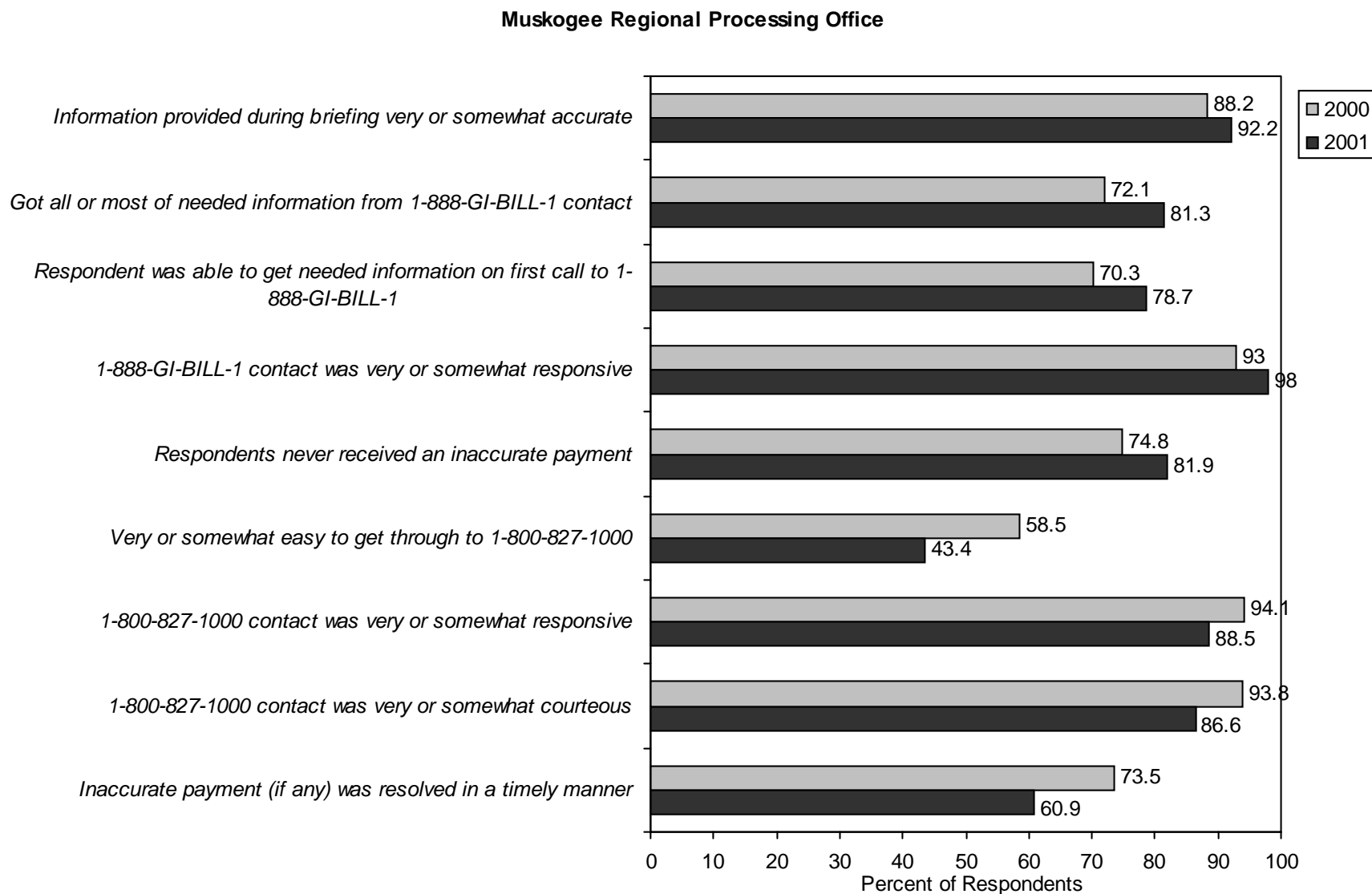
The following chart shows the significant **increases and decreases** in customer satisfaction for the Buffalo Regional Processing Office between the 2000 Survey and the 2001 Survey.





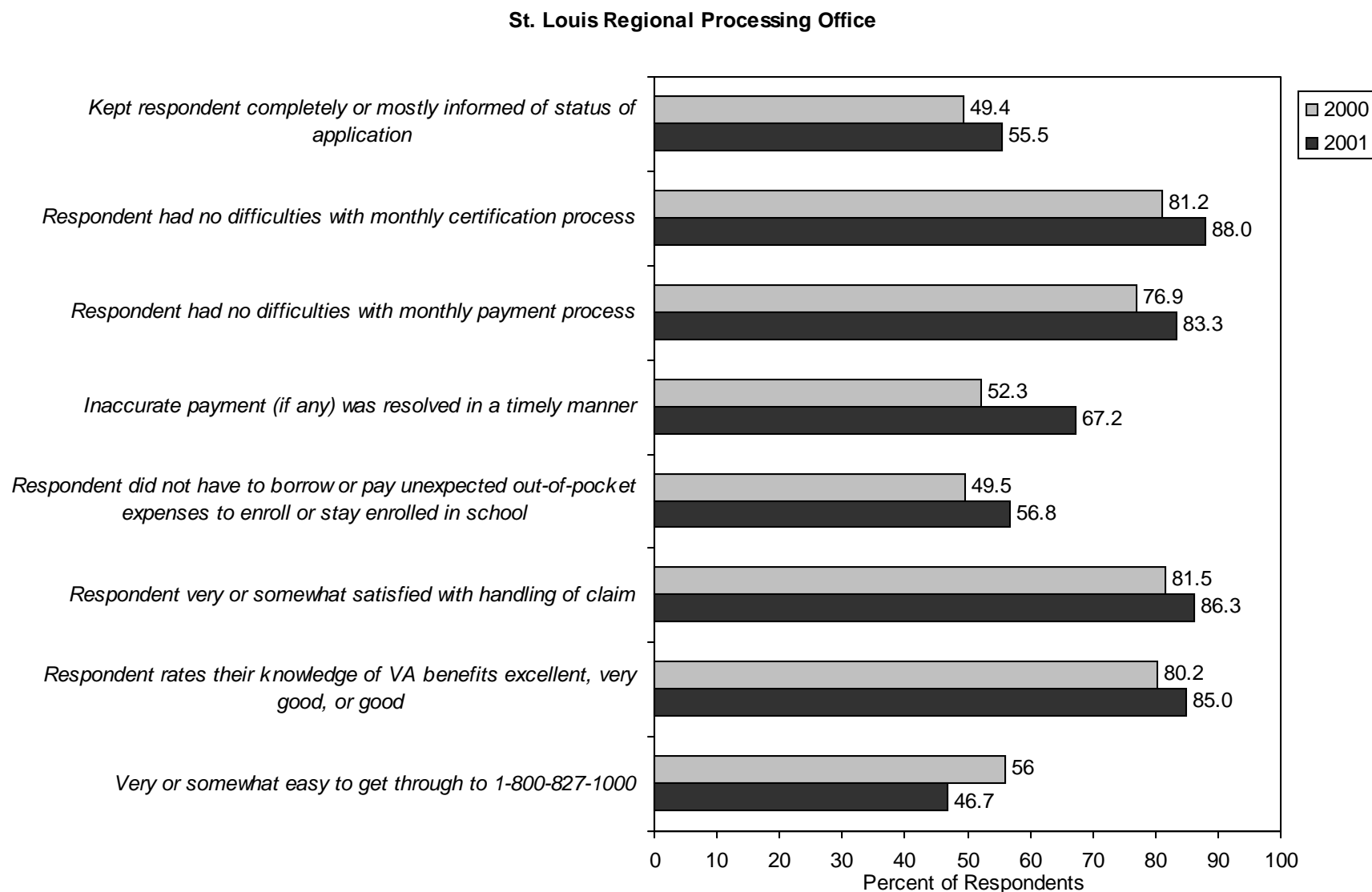
## *Executive Summary: Significant RPO Trends*

The following chart shows the significant **increases and decreases** in customer satisfaction for the Muskogee Regional Processing Office between the 2000 Survey and the 2001 Survey.



# ***Executive Summary: Significant RPO Trends***

The following chart shows the significant **increases and decreases** in customer satisfaction for the St. Louis Regional Processing Office between the 2000 Survey and the 2001 Survey.



# *Introduction and Methodology*

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- This report represents the fifth nationwide summary of beneficiary satisfaction with the VA education benefits claims process. The first report was issued in January of 1999 and presented the results of the Muskogee Pre-test and the Rollout Survey which were conducted between the fall 1997 and the summer of 1998. The second report was issued in May of 1999 and presented the results of the first simultaneous survey of all of the Regional Processing Offices. The third report and fourth reports were issued in May of 2000 and April of 2001, respectively.
- The three educational benefits programs administered by the VBA that were chosen to be studied with this survey are the following:
  - Chapter 30, Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty Educational Assistance Program, available to veterans and individuals currently on active-duty
  - Chapter 1606, Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserves Educational Assistance Program, available to members of the active reserve and National Guard
  - Chapter 35, Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program, available to certain dependents of veterans.
- The data in this report were collected for the four Regional Processing Offices (RPOs) from November of 2001 to mid-February of 2002, using mailed questionnaires which also gave respondents the option of completing the survey on the Internet. Roughly 16 percent of the respondents completed the survey on the Internet. The sample consisted of 1400 claims from each RPO, 700 original and 700 supplemental claims. It was also drawn to be proportionally representative of the three programs. The data have been weighted to reflect the true proportion of beneficiaries with original or supplemental claims, in order to avoid over-representation of original claimants.
- The content of the questionnaire was based on information gathered from focus groups with education beneficiaries and previous customer satisfaction surveys identified by the Surveys and Research Staff. Several revisions to the questionnaire took place between the Rollout phase and the second administration of the Survey in the fall of 1998. For example, a section of questions was added to assess customer satisfaction with the new 1-888-GI-BILL-1 phone number. A section requesting basic demographic information was also added in 1999. A further addition was made before the 2000 survey administration including more specific questions about difficulties which were tailored to each method of monthly certification (mail, phone, or internet). For the 2001 administration, the questions dealing with phone contact were consolidated into one section, with respondents being able to choose which phone number they called most and report on the service received from that number. A new section was added dealing with service received from the Internet website as well. Finally, the two separate questionnaires for veterans and active-duty personnel were consolidated into one; however, there is still a separate questionnaire for dependents.
- The response rate for the 2001 survey was 51.3 percent. This survey will continue to be administered on an annual basis.

## Summary Statistics

Characteristic	Percent in Sample-2000	Percent in Sample-2001	Percent satisfied with handling of claim-2000	Percent satisfied with handling of claim-2001
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	81.6	<b>85.6</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	72.7	72.9	81.4	<b>86.3</b>
Women	27.3	27.1	81.8	83.7
<b>Age</b>				
19 years and under	3.8	4.4	77.1	75.8
20 to 24 years	24.9	26.1	75.1	<b>83.0</b>
25 to 29 years	32.6	30.1	82.9	<b>86.3</b>
30 to 34 years	19.1	19.4	86.3	87.5
35 to 39 years	5.6	5.1	82.2	87.1
40 years or older	13.9	13.9	84.1	88.7
<b>Degree Objective</b>				
OJT or apprenticeship	1.0	0.9	75.9	84.0
Certificate/license program	7.0	6.6	84.3	79.8
2-year college program	31.7	32.4	82.9	<b>86.5</b>
4-year college program	52.3	52.1	80.6	<b>86.8</b>
Post-graduate degree	7.9	7.9	86.4	84.4
<b>Type of Claim</b>				
Original	12.2	17.3	70.8	<b>80.8</b>
Supplemental	87.8	82.7	83.0	<b>86.6</b>
<b>RPO</b>				
Atlanta	26.2	23.5	76.0	<b>80.1</b>
Buffalo	17.2	20.4	76.3	<b>83.6</b>
Muskogee	36.3	34.6	88.1	90.1
St. Louis	20.3	21.4	81.5	<b>86.3</b>
<b>Chapter</b>				
Chapter 30 (Veterans/Active-Duty)	72.5	72.2	82.9	<b>87.3</b>
Chapter 35 (Dependents)	11.9	11.6	84.2	78.3
Chapter 1606 (Reservists)	15.6	16.2	73.5	<b>83.6</b>

NOTE: Significant differences in satisfaction between 2000 and 2001 are bolded and italicized.

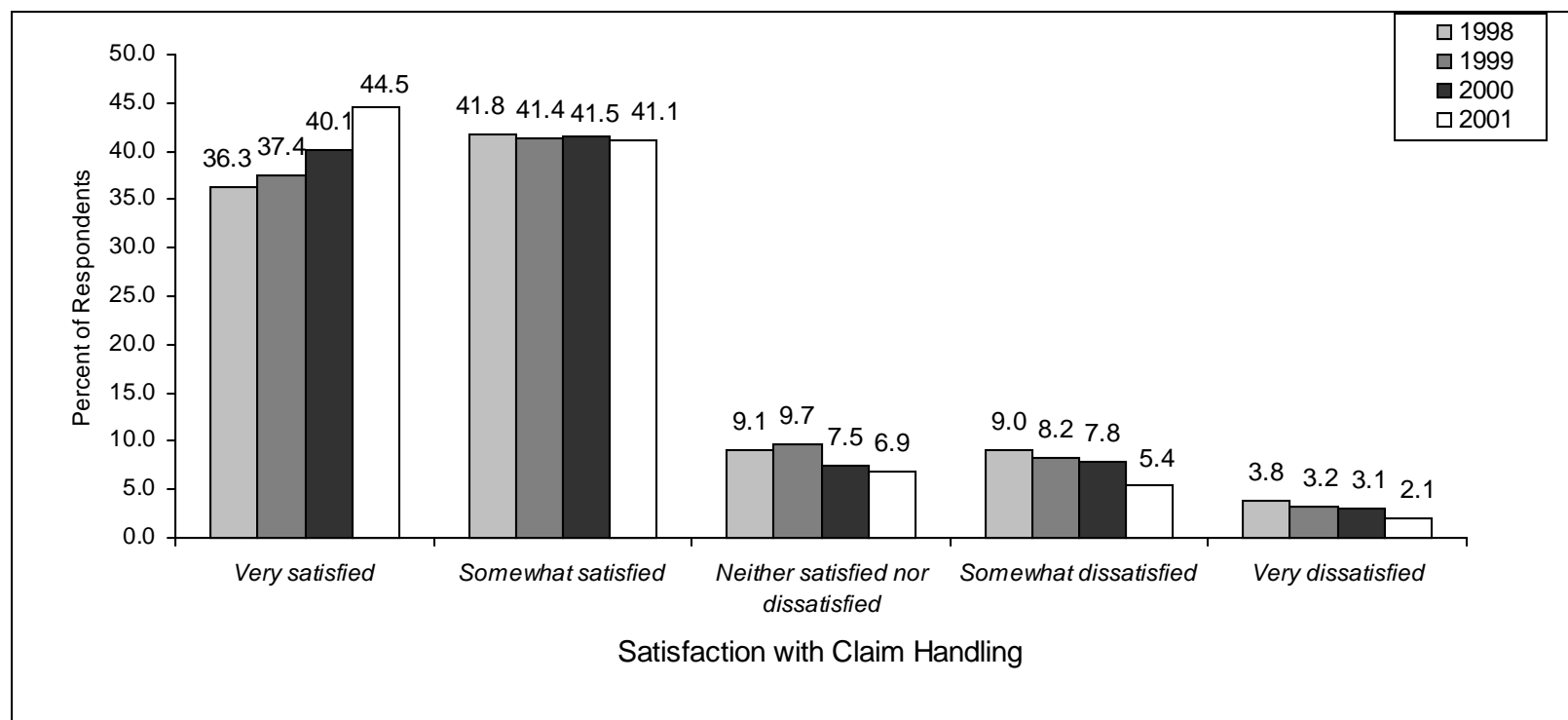
## *Discussion of Summary Statistics*

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- The chart on the previous page shows the demographic distribution of the survey respondents for both the 2000 and 2001 administrations, as well as the percentage of those who were very or somewhat satisfied with the handling of their claim for both the 2000 and 2001 administrations. Significant differences in the satisfaction levels between 2000 and 2001 are **bolded and italicized**.
- A significantly greater percentage of male respondents were satisfied with the handling of their claims in 2001 (86.3 percent) than in 2000 (81.4 percent).
- Respondents between the ages of 20 and 29 showed significant increases in overall satisfaction from 2000 to 2001; with those aged 20-24 increasing from 75.1 percent in 2000 to 83.0 percent in 2001, and those aged 25-29 increasing from 82.9 percent in 2000 to 86.3 percent in 2001.
- Both original and supplemental claimants showed significant increases in overall satisfaction from 2000 to 2001; respondents with original claims increased a full ten points, from 70.8 percent in 2000 to 80.8 percent in 2001.
- The Atlanta, Buffalo, and St. Louis RPOs all experienced a significant increase in overall satisfaction from 2000 to 2001, and the Muskogee regional office maintained its high level of claimant satisfaction at 90.1 percent.
- Veteran and Active-duty respondents participating in the Chapter 30 program were significantly more satisfied in 2001 (87.3 percent) than in 2000 (82.9 percent). Respondents in the Chapter 1606 program also reported a significantly higher satisfaction level in 2001 (83.6 percent) than in 2000 (73.5 percent).

## *Satisfaction with Claim Handling*

### Overall Satisfaction with Education Claim Handling for 1998-2001



- The percent distribution for overall satisfaction with the handling of an education claim has consistently improved for the past four years, with a significant increase in the percent of those very satisfied from 1999 (37.4 percent) to 2000 (40.1 percent) and also from 2000 to 2001 (44.5 percent).

# *Satisfaction with Claim Handling*

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## Introduction to Quadrant Analysis

Quadrant analysis is a useful tool in determining which individual performance areas need improvement in order to raise the overall quality of service. The analysis involves determining the importance of individual performance areas (how meaningful an area is to the veteran) and VA's performance in each area. Generally, items with high importance but relatively low performance are those which deserve immediate attention.

Each of the variables represented in the Quadrant Analysis graph are plotted on the basis of:

- 1) **Importance:** a variable's correlation with the overall satisfaction with the handling of a claim, and
- 2) **Performance:** a variable's topbox percent (the percent of people who answered positively to the question).

Importance is measured by variable correlations with *overall satisfaction with the handling of a claim*. These correlations determine the degree to which variables are related to overall satisfaction. Zero indicates no correlation, and 1 indicates perfect correlation. The closer a variable's correlation (Importance) is to 1, the stronger that variable's relationship is with the overall satisfaction with the handling of a claim. *Variables that have stronger correlations are considered to have higher importance.*

Performance is measured by the percentage of respondents who responded positively to a performance item. Topbox percents represent how well VA is performing within a given area (for example, the percent who received all or most of the information they needed from their contact with the VA Education Regional Processing Office). *The higher the percent, the better VA is performing.*

The quadrant analysis is divided into four quadrants (sections) based on the following combinations of the plotted location of a variable:

**Quadrant I: Critical Improvement Areas (high importance, low performance)**

**Quadrant II: Maintain Relationship Building Variables (high importance, high performance)**

**Quadrant III: Lower Return on High Performance (low importance, high performance)**

**Quadrant IV: Lower Return on Investment (low importance, low performance)**

The horizontal line in the plot represents importance and is placed at .40, which indicates reasonably high correlation. The vertical line represents performance and is placed at 80.0 percent. The quadrant lines can be moved up or down, left or right, to include more or fewer items in each quadrant. The plotted numbers within each section of the graph correspond with the performance items listed below. These numbers also refer to the question numbers used in the questionnaire.

# *Satisfaction with Claim Handling*

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## Items in Quadrant Analysis

**Quadrant I** contains four (4) items on which VA is not performing as well as it could be, but which significantly impacts veterans' satisfaction with the handling of their claim.

**Question 20b** Very or somewhat easy to get through to VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1.

**Question 22b** Got all or most of needed information from 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact.

**Question 47** VA kept respondent completely or mostly informed of status of application.

**Question 60** Inaccurate payment resolved in a timely manner (for those who received inaccurate payments).

**Quadrant II** contains four (4) items on which VA is performing well and which are important to overall satisfaction. VA should maintain current practices and resources for these items so that performance does not decline and negatively affect satisfaction.

**Question 25a** VA 1-800-827-1000 contact was very or somewhat responsive.

**Question 25b** VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact was very or somewhat responsive.

**Question 26b** VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact was very or somewhat courteous.

**Question 66** Respondent's knowledge of VA benefits for which they might be entitled excellent, very good, or good.



# *Satisfaction with Claim Handling*

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## Items in Quadrant Analysis

**Quadrant III** contains twelve (12) items on which VA is performing well but which, while important to overall satisfaction, do not have as great an impact as other items.

**Question 5** Information received from first source was very or somewhat accurate.

**Question 9** Information received from briefing sessions was very or somewhat accurate. (Veterans and active-duty servicemembers)

**Question 15** School veteran representative was very or somewhat responsive.

**Question 16** School veteran representative was very or somewhat courteous.

**Question 26a** VA 1-800-827-1000 contact was very or somewhat courteous.

**Question 27a** VA 1-800-827-1000 contact was able to give info about respondent's particular claim.

**Question 27b** VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact was able to give info about respondent's particular claim.

**Question 41** Respondents did not have difficulty with application form.

**Question 52** Respondents did not have difficulty with monthly certification process.

**Question 57** Respondents did not have difficulty with monthly payments.

**Question 62** Never had to delay enrollment due to VA not completing paperwork on time.

**Question 63** Respondent has good understanding of benefits used and remaining.

# *Satisfaction with Claim Handling*

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## Items in Quadrant Analysis

**Quadrant IV** contains fifteen (15) items on which VA is not performing as well as it could, but which are also not considered to have as great an impact on overall satisfaction as other items. There is a lower return on investment in these items, but, given resources, improvement could be sought.

- Question 8** Got all or most of needed information from briefing sessions.
- Question 11** Got all or most of needed information from pamphlet.
- Question 14** Got all or most of needed information from school veteran representative.
- Question 20a** Very or somewhat easy to get through to VA 1-800-827-1000 number.
- Question 22a** Got all or most of needed information from VA 1-800-827-1000 contact.
- Question 23a** Able to get needed information on first call to VA 1-800-827-1000.
- Question 23b** Able to get needed information on first call to VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1.
- Question 30** Got all or most of needed information from VA's Internet website.
- Question 31** Respondents did not have difficulty with VA website.
- Question 35** Got all or most of needed information from contact with VA through Internet or email.
- Question 44** Respondent completely or mostly understood steps necessary to process claim.

**Question 45** Respondents completely or mostly understood how benefits would be paid.

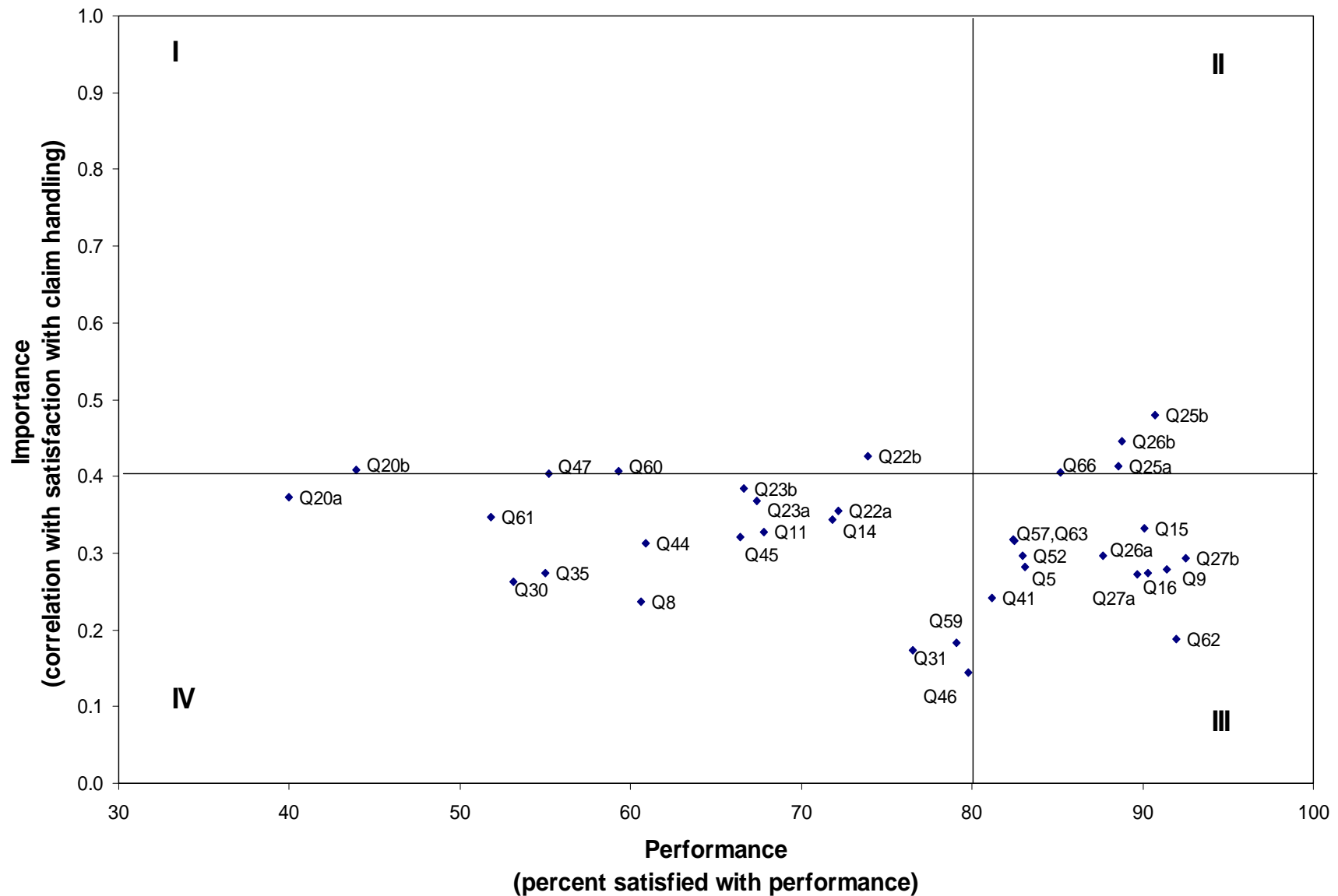
**Question 46** VA let respondent know application had been received.

**Question 59** Respondent has never received an inaccurate payment.

**Question 61** Respondent never had to borrow or pay out-of-pocket expenses in order to enroll or stay enrolled in school because VA did not complete paperwork in time.

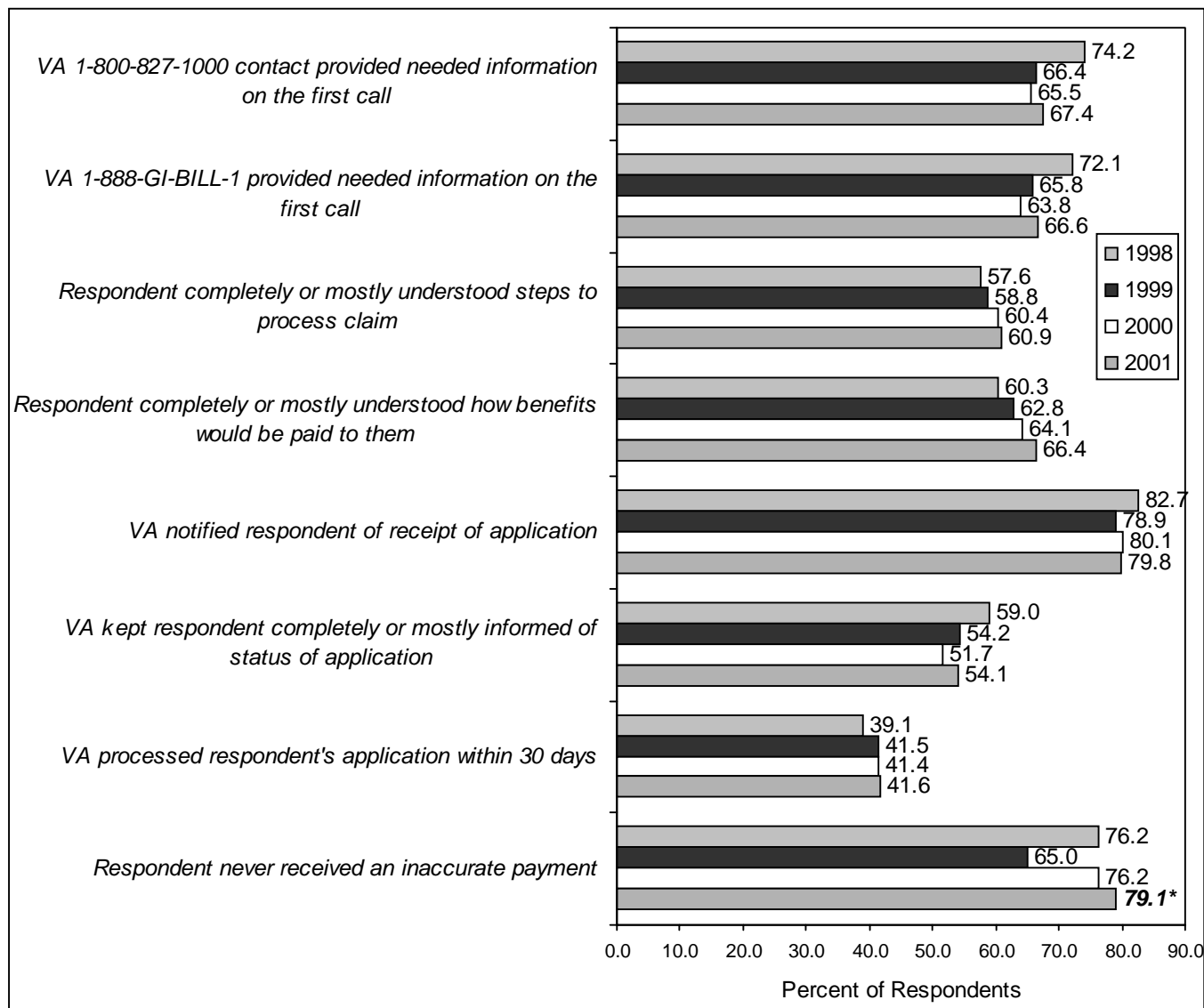
# *Satisfaction with Claim Handling*

## Quadrant Analysis



# National Performance Trends

## Selected Education Service Customer Service Standards, 1998-2001

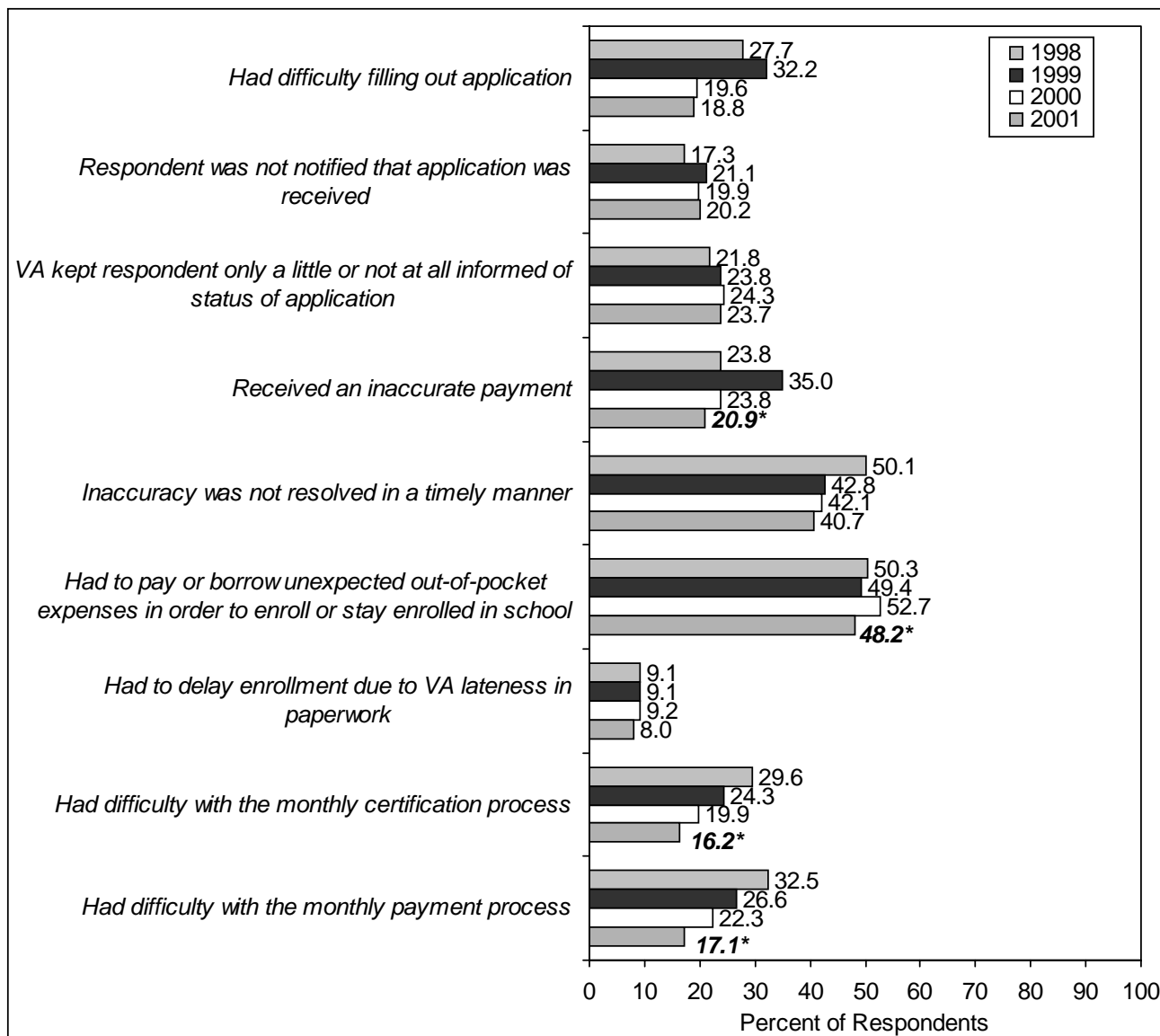


\* Indicates significant difference between 2000 and 2001.

- These standards were developed by the VBA Education Service as the result of Executive Order 12862 which required government organizations to measure their current customer service.
- The percent of respondents who reported that they have never received an inaccurate payment has **increased** significantly from 76.2 percent in 2000 to 79.1 percent in 2001.

# National Performance Trends

## Respondent Frustration with Application and Benefit Payment Processes, 1998-2001

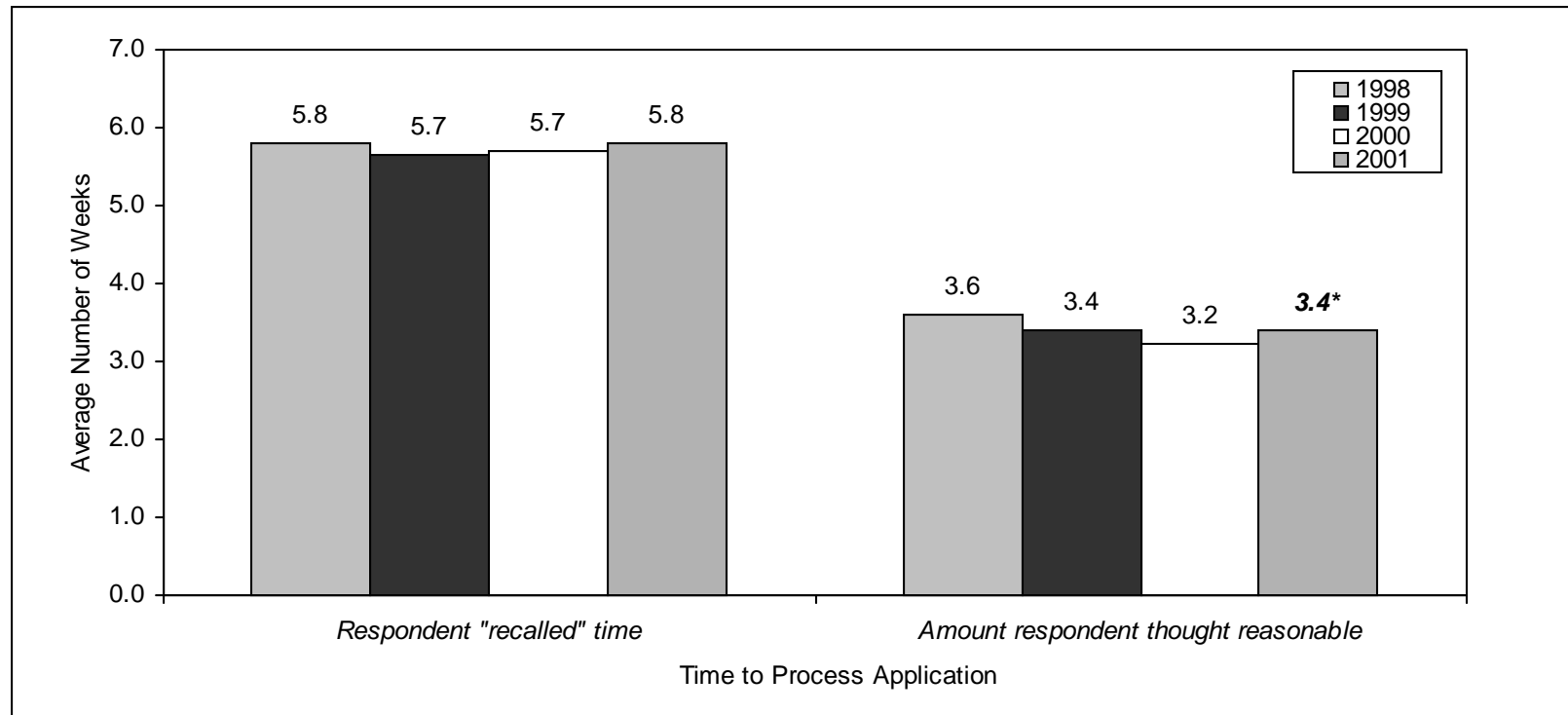


\*Indicates significant difference between 2000 and 2001.

- The percentage of respondents having difficulty with the monthly certification process (19.9 percent to 16.2 percent), or the monthly payment process (22.3 percent to 17.1 percent) has **declined** significantly every year since 1998.
- The percentage of respondents who reported receiving an inaccurate payment **decreased** significantly for the second year in a row, from 23.8 percent in 2000 to 20.9 percent in 2001.
- The percentage of respondents who had to borrow or pay unexpected out-of-pocket expenses to enroll or stay enrolled in school **decreased** significantly from 52.7 percent in 2000 down to 48.2 percent in 2001.

## ***National Performance Trends***

### Comparison of Recalled Time and Time Respondent Thought Reasonable to Process Application (Average Number of Weeks), 1998-2001

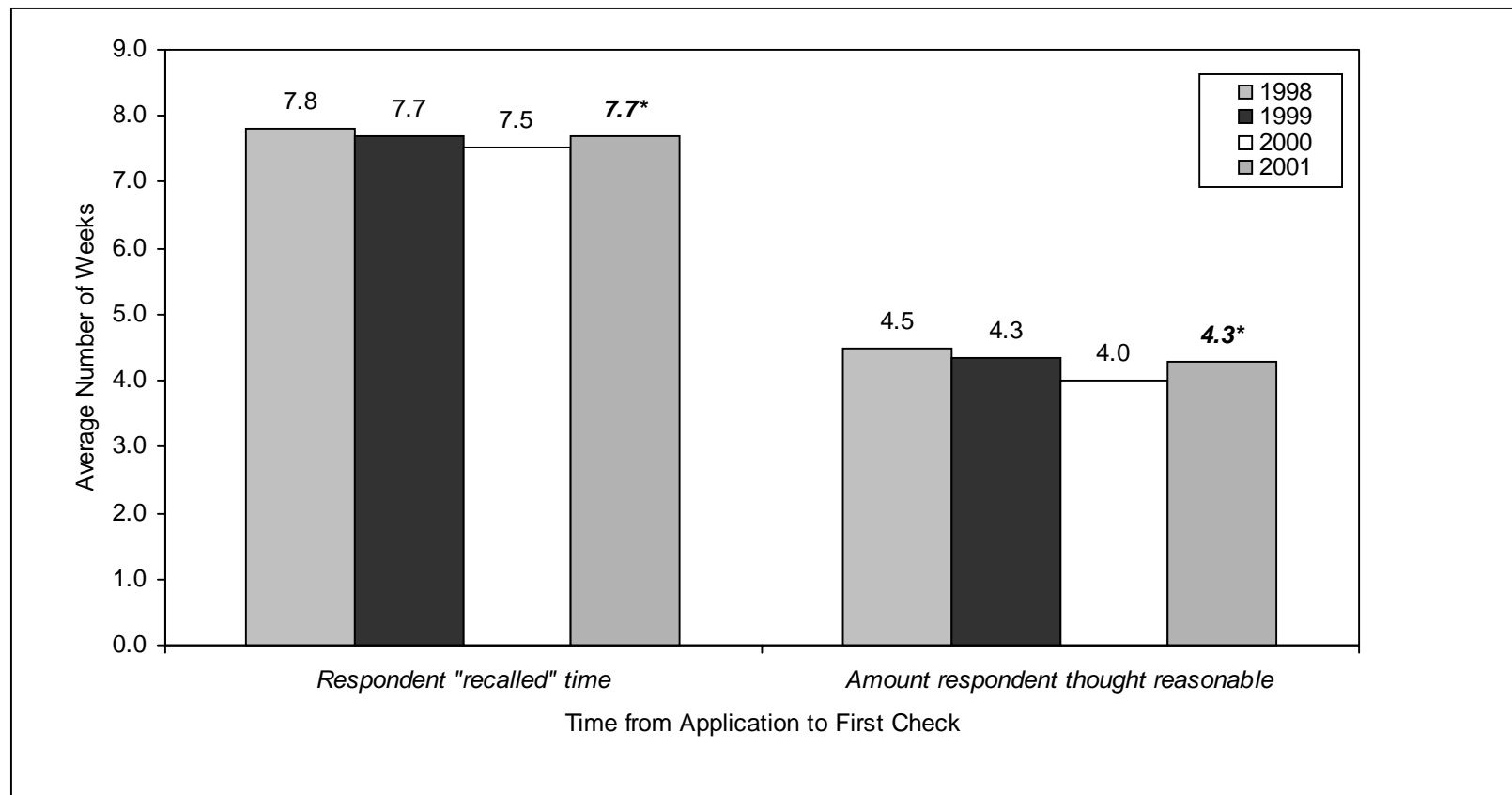


\*Indicates significant difference between 2000 and 2001.

- The amount of time respondents thought was reasonable for processing the application **increased** significantly from 3.2 weeks back up to 3.4 weeks, while the actual amount of time respondents recalled for processing the application has remained stable from 1998 to 2001.

## *National Performance Trends*

Comparison of Recalled Time and Time Respondent Thought Reasonable from Application Submission to First Check (Average Number of Weeks), 1998-2001

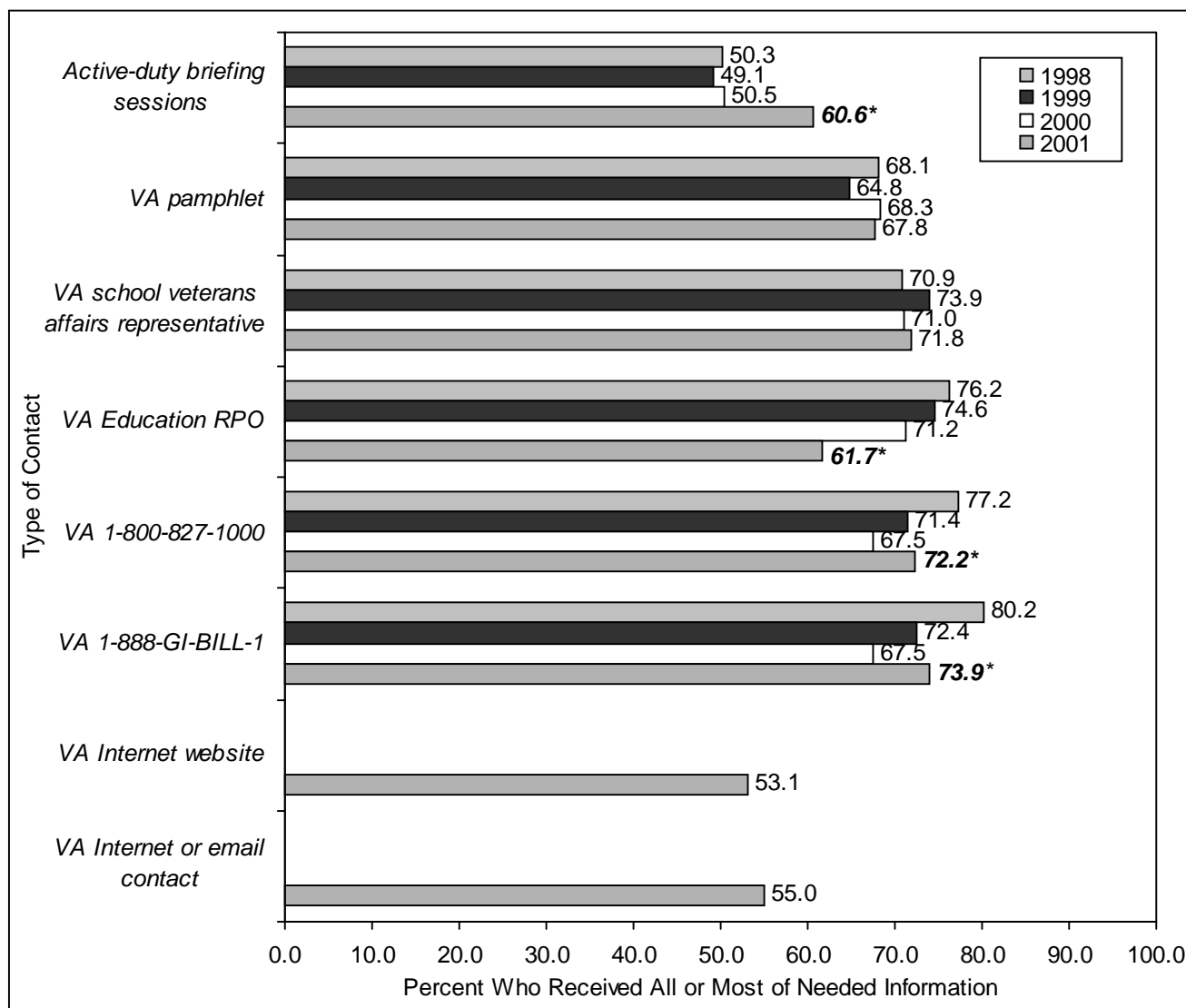


\*Indicates significant difference from 2000 to 2001.

- The amount of time respondents thought was reasonable from the application being processed to the receipt of their first check *increased* significantly from 4 weeks to 4.3 weeks, and the amount of time respondents actually recalled it taking to receive their first check also *increased* significantly from 7.5 weeks to 7.7 weeks.

# National Performance Trends

## Percent of Respondents Who Received All or Most of Needed Information by Type of Contact, 1998-2001



\*Indicates significant difference from 2000 to 2001.

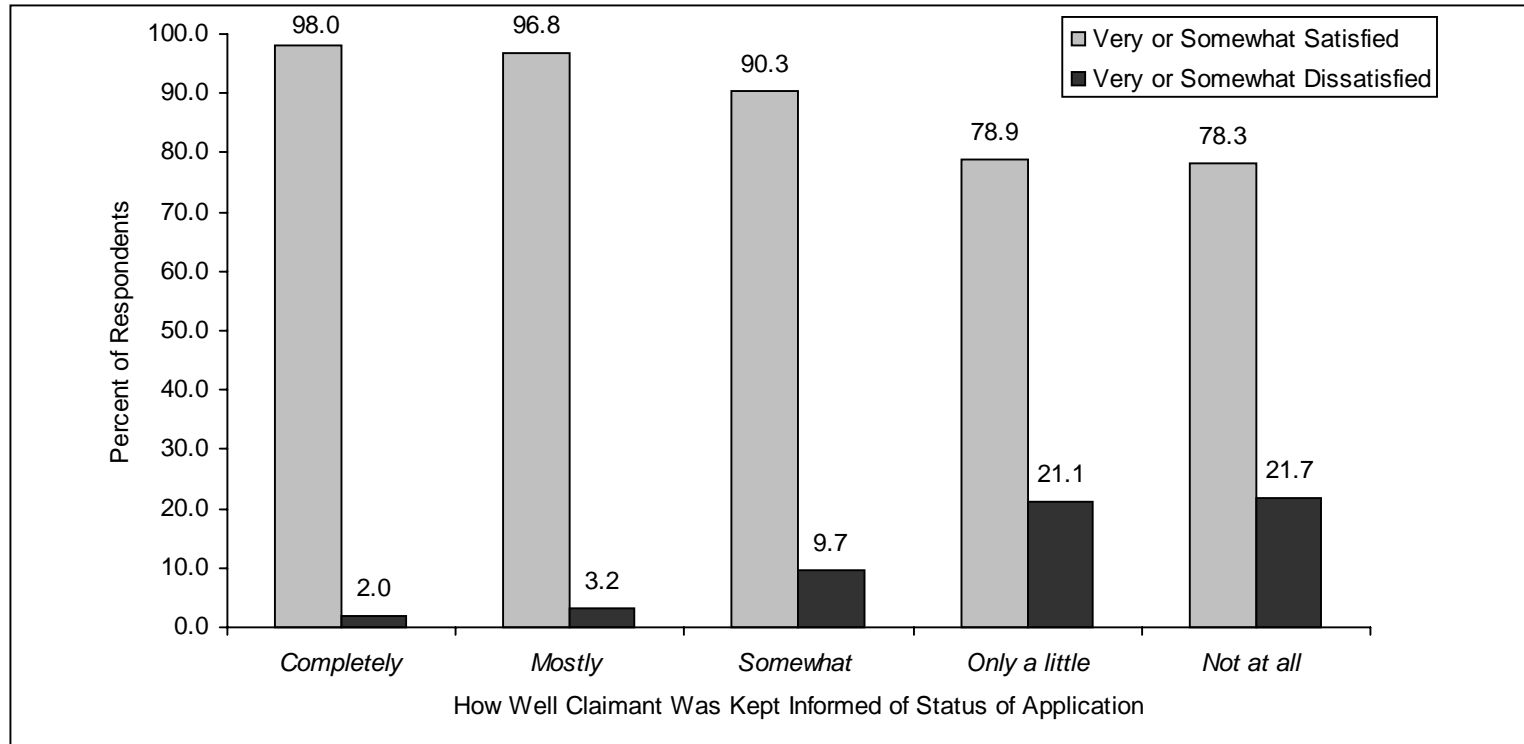
- For both the 1-800-827-1000 and 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contacts, the percent of respondents who said they received all or most of needed information **increased** significantly, from 67.5 percent to 72.2 percent for 1-800-827-1000, and from 67.5 percent to 73.9 percent for 1-888-GI-BILL-1.

- A new section was added to the questionnaire in 2001 asking about service received through the Internet. Over half (53.1 percent) of respondents who visited the website got all or most of the information they needed, and 55 percent of those who contacted VA through the Internet website or email got all or most of the information they needed.



## ***Influences on Overall Satisfaction***

### **Overall Satisfaction With Claim Handling by How Well Claimant Was Kept Informed of Status of Application**

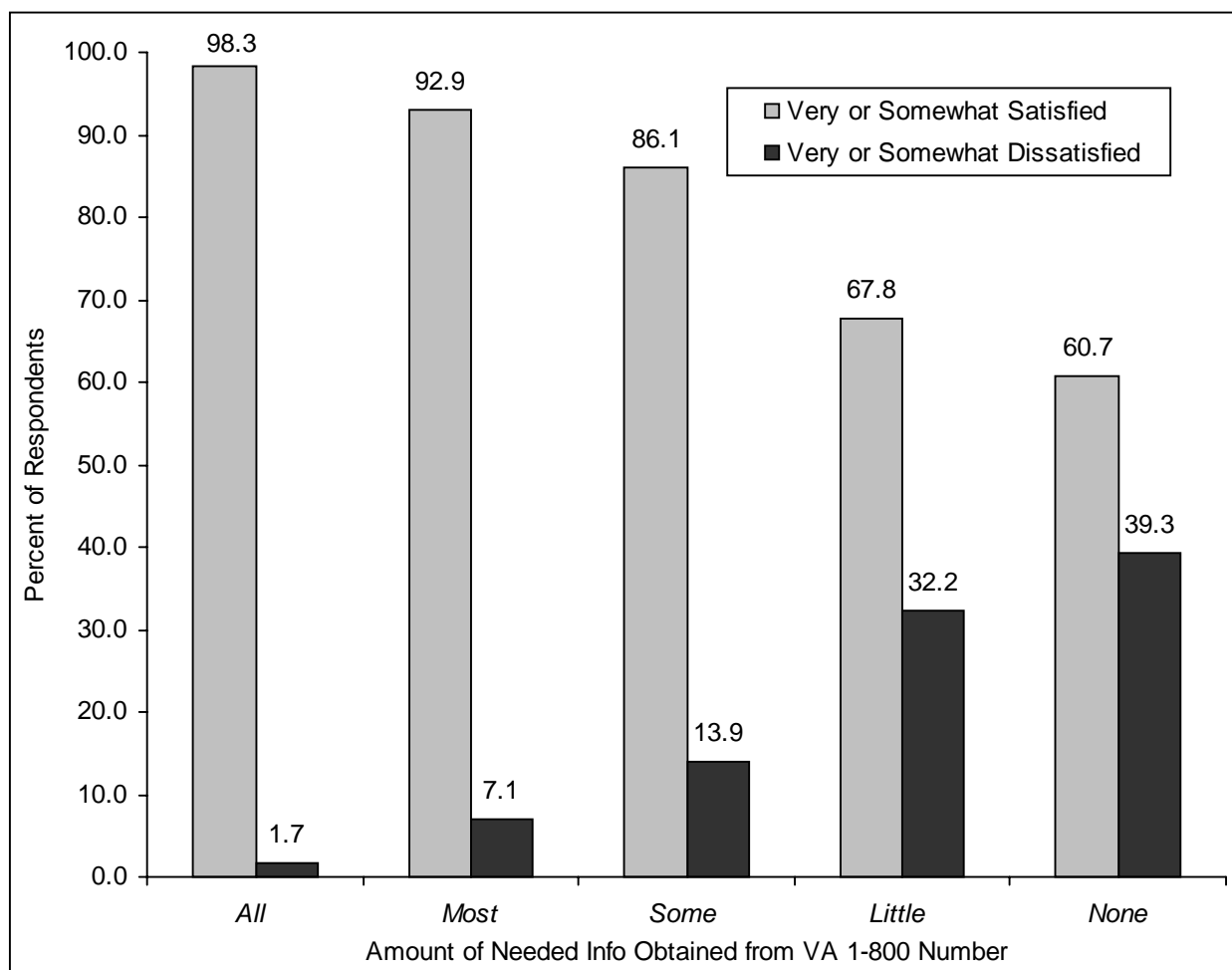


- A full 98.0 percent of the respondents who were kept completely informed of the status of their application were satisfied with the handling of their claim; but only 78.3 percent of those respondents who were not at all informed of the status of their application were satisfied with the handling of their claim.

NOTE: The category “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” was not included in this analysis.

## ***Influences on Overall Satisfaction***

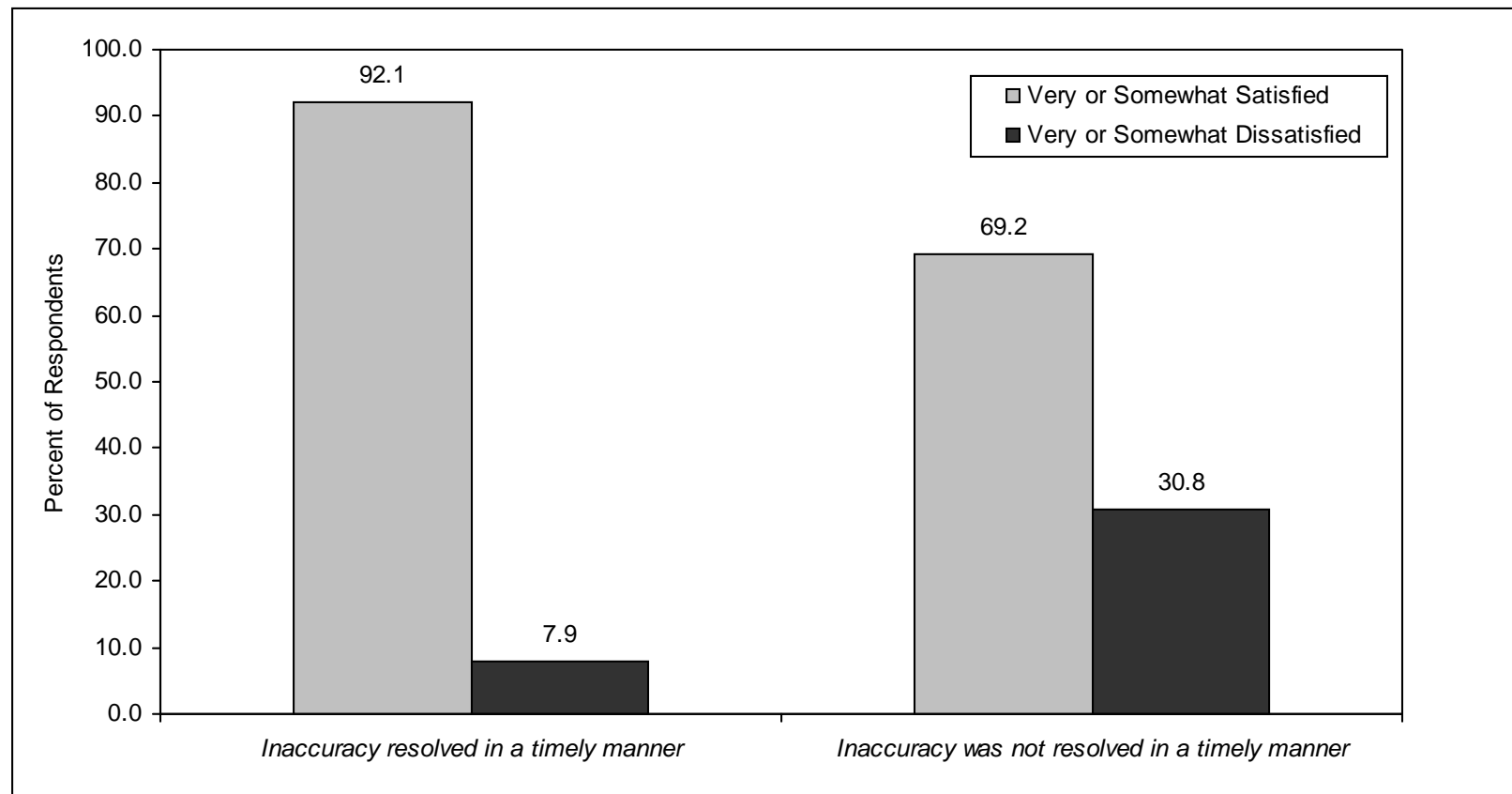
### **Overall Satisfaction With Claim Handling by How Much Needed Information Was Obtained by Calling VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1**



- There is a clear relationship between the amount of needed information received from VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1 and overall satisfaction with the handling of claims. 98.3 percent of those respondents who received all of the needed information were satisfied with their claim handling, compared to only 60.7 percent of those respondents who received no needed information.
- There is a large decrease in the percentage of respondents reporting satisfaction from those who received some needed information from VA 1-888-GI-BILL-1 (86.1 percent) to those who received little needed information (67.8 percent).
- NOTE: The category “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” was not included in this analysis.

## ***Influences on Overall Satisfaction***

### **Overall Satisfaction with Claim Handling by Whether Inaccurate Payment was Resolved in a Timely Manner**

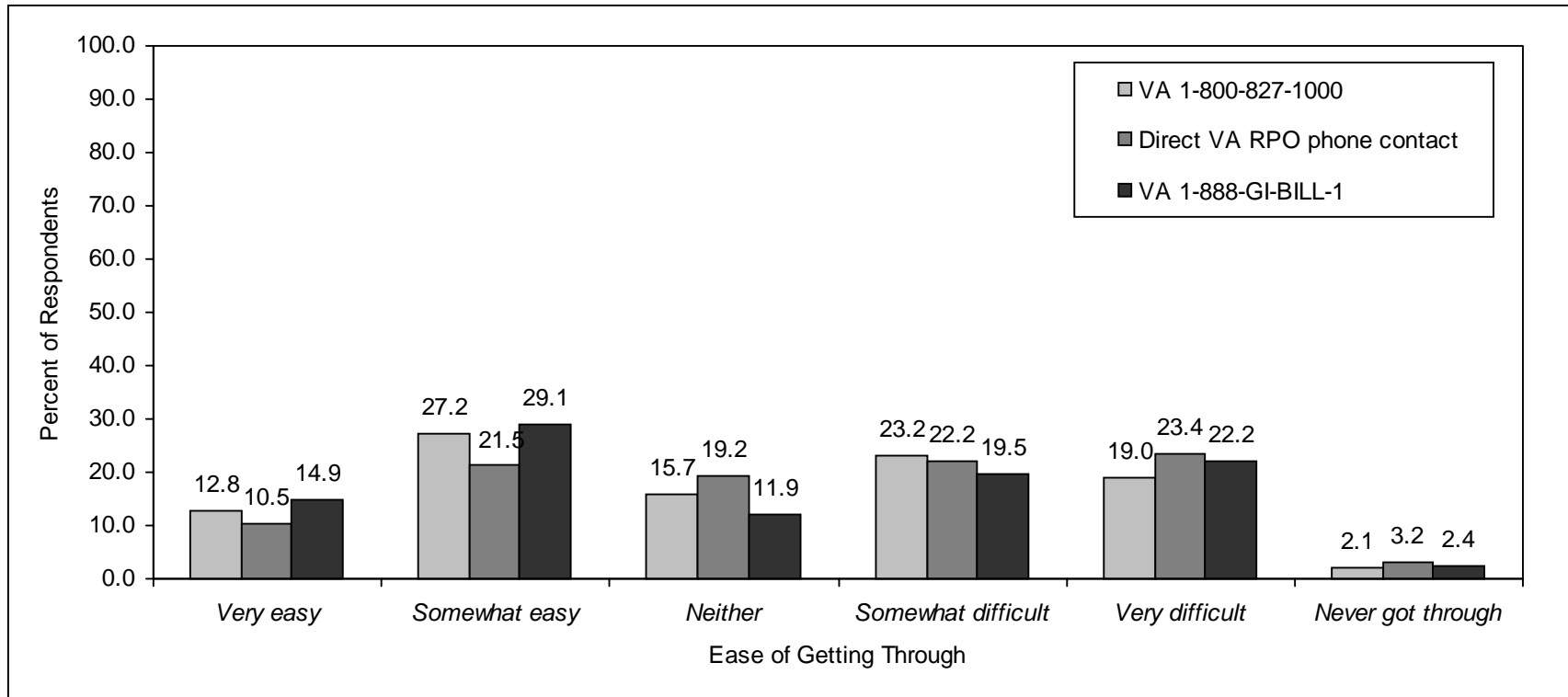


- For those who received an inaccurate payment, having it resolved in a timely manner helped increase their overall satisfaction with claim handling to 92.1 percent, whereas only 69.2 percent of those who did not see their inaccurate payment resolved quickly were satisfied with the handling of their claim.

NOTE: The category “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” was not included in this analysis.

## Telephone Contact

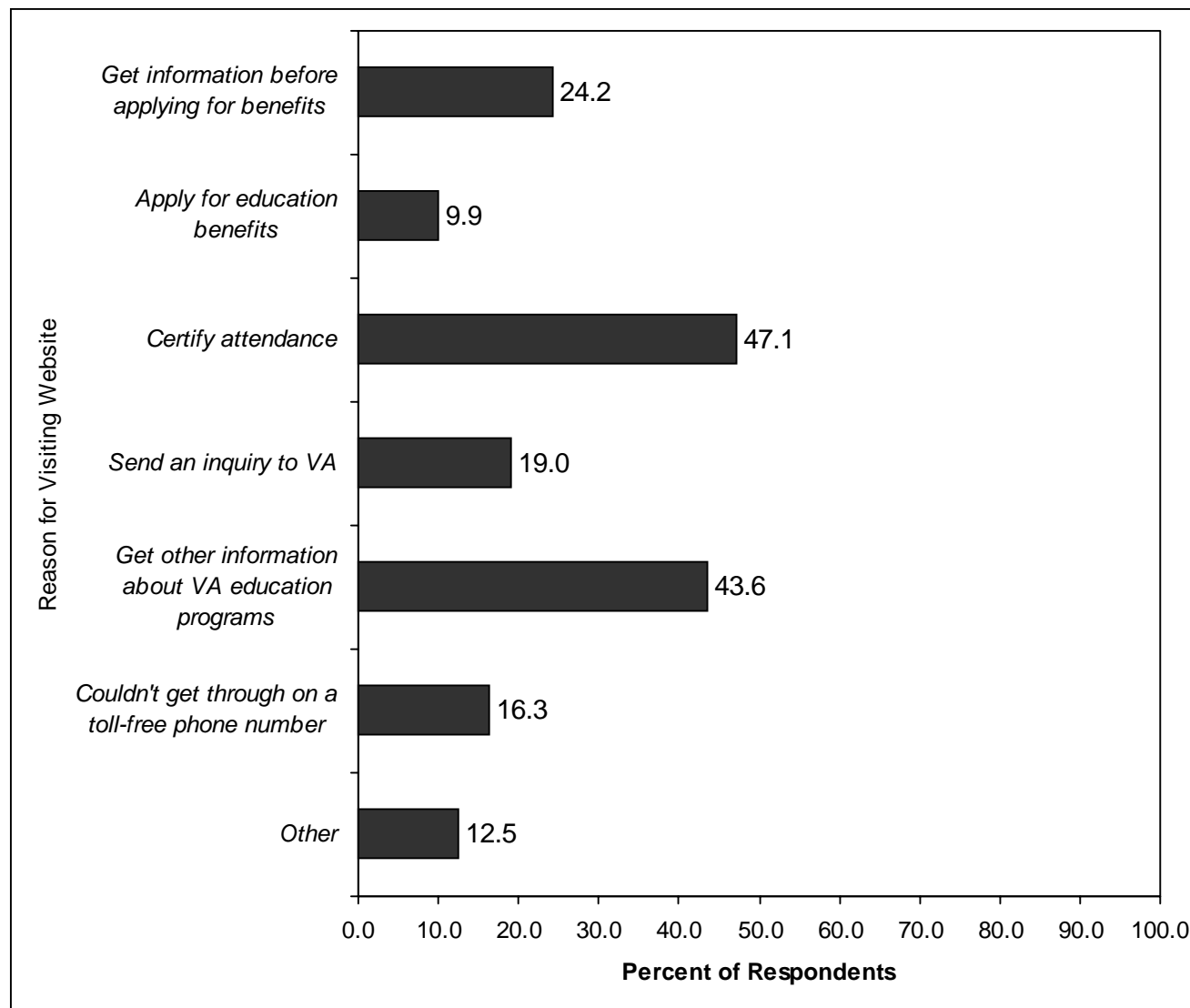
### Ease of Getting Through to VA by Phone by Method of Phone Contact



- Less than one-sixth of the respondents reported that it was very easy to get through to any of the sources, but the lowest percentage was for the VA RPO (10.5 percent).
- Those who called the RPO direct phone number had the hardest time getting through, with almost half (48.8 percent ) reporting it was somewhat difficult, very difficult, or that they never got through, but both the 1-888-GI-BILL-1 and the 1-800-827-1000 numbers followed closely behind at 44.1 and 44.3 percent respectively reporting difficulties in getting through.

# Internet Contact

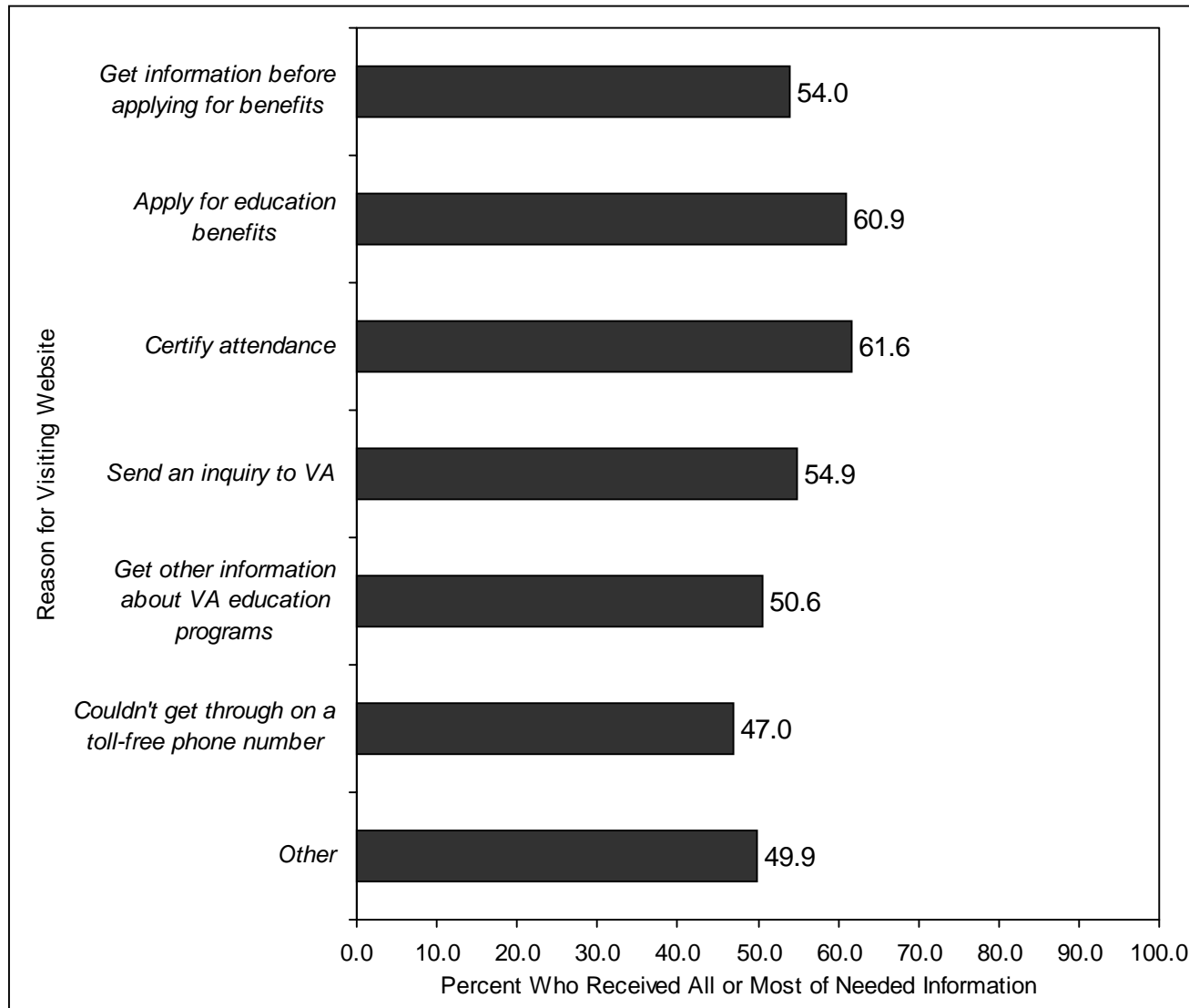
## Reasons for Visiting WWW.GIBILL.VA.GOV



- For those who visited the VA Internet website ([www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)), almost half (47.1 percent) did so in order to certify their school attendance.
- Obtaining information about VA education programs was the second biggest reason for visiting the website, with 43.6 percent of respondents who visited the website listing this as a reason.

## *Internet Contact*

### Percent of Respondents Who Received All or Most of Needed Information From Internet Website by Reason for Visiting Website



- For those who visited the VA Internet website ([www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)) in order to certify attendance, the majority (61.6 percent) received all or most of the information they needed from the website.
- Unfortunately, for those who visited the website because they were having difficulty getting through on a toll-free number, only 47 percent received all or most of the information they needed.

## ***Appendix: RPO Performance Differences on Selected Issues***

---

This Appendix provides Regional Processing Office comparisons on those questions where there were significant differences in performance among the four RPOs.

- **Bolded** percentages highlight stations which are significantly *higher* than other stations on the given performance item.
- **Underlined** percentages highlight stations which are significantly *lower* than other stations on the given performance item.
- **Italicized** percentages denote the stations which are significantly different than the station(s) with the bolded or underlined percentages.

<i><b>Performance Item by Category</b></i>	<i><b>Atlanta</b></i>	<i><b>Buffalo</b></i>	<i><b>Muskogee</b></i>	<i><b>St. Louis</b></i>
<b><i>Phone/Internet Contact</i></b>				
Respondent was able to get information about their particular claim from 1-800-827-1000 contact	<u>84.0</u>	91.7	90.9	92.3
Respondent found it very or somewhat easy to get through to 1-888-GI-BILL-1 number	34.5	27.1	55.5	51.0
Respondent got all or most of the information they needed from 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact	68.3	72.5	81.3	69.0
Respondent was able to get needed information on first call to 1-888-GI-BILL-1	51.9	59.8	78.7	70.3
1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact was very or somewhat responsive	86.8	89.0	97.9	84.4
1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact was very or somewhat courteous	83.0	88.5	95.0	85.1
Respondent was able to get information about their particular claim from 1-888-GI-BILL-1 contact	<u>86.8</u>	92.6	95.6	95.3
Respondent got all or most of the information they needed from Internet or email contact	<u>41.2</u>	56.4	62.7	64.0
<b><i>Application Process</i></b>				
Respondent was kept completely or mostly informed of status of application	52.1	53.8	57.3	56.8
<b><i>Payment Process</i></b>				
Respondent never received an inaccurate payment from VA	<u>72.3</u>	82.9	81.9	78.5
Inaccurate payment was resolved in a timely manner	51.1	61.5	60.9	66.9
Respondent never had to borrow or pay out-of-pocket expenses to stay in school because VA did not complete paperwork on time	<u>47.6</u>	54.2	50.2	56.7
<b><i>Overall Satisfaction</i></b>				
Respondent was very or somewhat satisfied with handling of claim	80.1	83.6	90.1	86.3